

Plum-headed Finches near Richmond, New South Wales.—The status of the Plum-headed Finch, *Aidemosyne modesta*, in the Sydney District (County of Cumberland) has been uncertain in past years. In more recent times a number of reported sightings have, in some cases at least, been based on the wrong identification of the introduced Spice Finch, *Lonchura punctulata*, a species which bears a superficial resemblance to the Plum-headed Finch, and one which was not figured in Neville W. Cayley's "*What Bird is That?*" until 1958 (second edition).

The following relevant information has been kindly given to me by K. A. Hindwood:

Glenorie, 25 miles to the north of Sydney.

"The only note I have about Plum-headed Finches relates to a small number seen in the company of Red-browed Finches on 17th November, 1944" (Gordon Miller in *Litt.* Sept. 9, 1945).

Hindwood visited the locality on August 19, 1945, and noted that it was a cultivation paddock, in fallow, surrounded by orchards and forest country. In February, 1946, Miller was shown skins of both Plum-headed and Spice Finches and he was definite that the birds he saw were Plum-headed Finches.

Cage Birds Weekly (a journal that ceased publication after one year) printed a note by an anonymous writer who stated: "I have seen the Plum-headed Finch on the South Coast (of New South Wales) at Dapto and along the river at Menangle, so evidently they travel considerably". (Vol. 1, No. 23, 6th February, 1937, P. 3). Menangle is about 40 miles south-west of Sydney.

Another locality, east of the Great Dividing Range, where Plum-headed Finches have been recorded on a number of occasions by Miss Helena Doyle, is Monobalai in the Wybong Valley, near Muswellbrook, about 100 miles north of Sydney. In addition A. R. McGill recorded seeing 10 of these finches on 1st February, 1960, at Bulga, some 35 miles south-east of Monobalai.

In normal circumstances the Plum-headed Finch is considered to be largely an "inland" species in New South Wales: that is, it is to be found mostly west of the Great Dividing Range. The low elevation of the Range in that part of the Hunter Valley west of Muswellbrook and Bulga, and a pronounced "inland" element in the physiography of those parts may explain the presence there of what appears to be a resident population of Plum-headed Finches.

Early in the morning of January 1, 1966, some friends and I were banding in a swampy area surrounded by grasslands and cultivation paddocks near Richmond, some 40 miles north-west of Sydney. Among the birds netted were 24 Chestnut-breasted Finches, *Donacola castaneothorax*, 23 Reed Warblers, *Acrocephalus australis*, and, surprisingly, a pair of Plum-headed Finches

which had not been noticed prior to capture, nor were they seen or heard after being banded and released.

Subsequently, on January 29, 1966, two immature Plum-headed Finches were netted and banded at the place where the two adults were caught for weeks previously. One of the young birds was without any plum colouring on its head, the other had a small patch of that colour on its crown. Neither had any barring on the underparts: both were probably not more than about three months of age.

Although only four birds were netted and banded, and none seen otherwise, it is most unlikely that they were the only birds in the locality, which is an area of extensive reedy and grassy habitats suitable for the species.

It would seem that there is, at the present time, a small breeding population of Plum-headed Finches in the Richmond district. Whether these birds have originated from aviary escapees, or have moved into the Sydney district (and perhaps elsewhere in coastal New South Wales?) because of severe drought conditions existing over most of the inland parts of the State, is, of course, a matter that cannot be determined. Perhaps the species has been present near Sydney for some years but has been overlooked because of its unobtrusive habits. It could easily pass unnoticed among the large numbers of Chestnut-breasted Finches, Zebra Finches, *Taenopygia castanotis*, Red-browed Finches, *Aegintha temporalis*, and the introduced Goldfinches, *Carduelis carduelis*, and Spice Finches that occur in various parts of the County of Cumberland.—S. G. LANE, 65 Wood Street, Lane Cove, N.S.W.